

## **ABILITY TO USE WORD ORDER IN LEARNING MALAY LANGUAGE**

### **BY INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

The influence of the mother tongue will affect the learning process while learning the Malay language (BM) as a second language. It is observed that the aspect which strongly influences the learning process of international students in learning BM is the grammatical aspect. Therefore, this study aimed to examine the ability to apply the rules of word order to international students in terms of their Malay writing. The study takes into account the learning process that lasts for one semester at one stage only, namely, Level One (Basic Level). The data was taken twice, during the middle and end of the semester through the middle and end of semester tests. This research also shows the comparison in terms of ability or achievement of students in their understanding of the use of this grammar aspect. The study found that over 60% of students are able to apply word order in their writing and at the same time, more than 45% of students are able to use it accurately and entirely correct.

**KEYWORDS:** International Students, Word Order, Writing, Ability, Mastery

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In the process of learning a second language, students are often influenced by the existing system in their native language. For students who are learning English as their second language, they will also be easily influenced by the grammatical structure in the English language when learning a third language, for example learning Malay. In using Malay, foreign students will easily utter phrases such as "nama saya → name my (my name)", "pensyarah baik → lecturer good (good lecturer)", "rumah cantik → house beautiful (beautiful house)" and the like in writing or during communication. This is because in the existing dictionary in their thinking influences the way they interpret the Malay (BM) phrase. It is agreed by Nian Shyi Ong (2008:26) who says that grammar aspect is important to be taught in advance so that foreign students will not be distracted by the grammatical system of their native language.

In teaching the concept of structured methods, McNeil (1970) argues that the acquisition of syntax of a sequence can be determined by the scope of a syntactic structure that have been learned. Schlesinger (1971, 1974) also emphasizes that there is a close relationship between a person's oral communication and grammatical structures learned. Accordingly, this study tries to look at the relationship between grammatical structures taught in the students' ability to apply and also see how the ability to apply this method provides a positive impact on the achievement of foreign students in learning the Malay language. Objectives of the Study are as follows: Firstly, is to identify the percentage of foreign students applying the structured method through the use of Word Order in their writing. Secondly, categorizing students applying structured methods based on their achievement. Thirdly, making a comparison of the percentage of student achievement based on two different teaching periods (two different exams). Lastly, to identify whether a structured teaching method is capable of

positively affecting the Malay language teaching to foreign students.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A study was conducted to research on the word order in the Malay language. It found that the shift from a dominant VS to a dominant SV word order is attributed to the change from an oral to a written tradition. This study closely related styles of Malay at the turn century points out the need to study discourse structures of distinct styles and genres separately. The assumption that a language will employ similar patterns of organization even in such fundamental areas as word order cannot be assumed. The structure of a language is too closely tied to its social functions and context to allow similarities across genre and style to be taken for granted (Rafferty, 1987).

Of the languages which follows the word order SVO (also known as canonical word order), only English abides strictly by that description. German and Dutch are either a mixed VO/OV (at the more conservative literary standard) or almost completely SOV at the colloquial level. And Italian displays a flexible, pragmatically-sensitive word-order, at least in so far as the relative position of the subject is concerned. Of the two supposed SOV languages, Hungarian has a flexible word-order. One must, finally, be reminded that Greenberg (1966) classified the pragmatically- flexible (Biblical) Hebrew as VSO, the equally-flexible Italian and Malay as SVO, and was, on the whole, altogether silent on the existence of word-order flexibility, or degree of word-order rigidity in general (Givón, T, 1988).

The fact that word order is very important in acquiring Malay language is highlighted by yet another researcher. He says that mistakes of sociocultural grammar/sociolinguistic grammar, are not readily tolerated by Malays. Malays as a rule never tell the offender directly that s/he has committed a breach of etiquette. They consider it most impolite to "tell off" anyone, even a child, let alone adults. It is most likely that the offender will be shunned if s/he continues to commit breaches, will be considered to be a very nice person, and probably will not receive or be given any more attention.

It is not uncommon for a non-Malay (local or foreign) whose command of Malay is imperfect to be commended by a Malay for being competent in using appropriate forms of address, pronouns and lexical choices, some of the affective characteristics of Malay. Malays react warmly toward non-Malays/speakers of Malay as a second language who show a little genteelness in their speech (Kok, 2001).

From all of the previous literature, it is clear to see the importance of Word Order in learning Malay language and to be accepted as a proficient speaker.

## METHODOLOGY

Data for this study was taken from the 36 sample test papers midterm and final exam those students taking MALB 103 courses, which is the Bahasa Melayu (Malay Language) for International Students during the last special semester (March to May 2013). Student samples taken for this study are the students taking the courses at a basic level at University Tenaga Nasional (UNITEN). In this special semester, only one class was offered. In this course, students must undergo 42 hours of instruction, 6 hours of instruction per week for 7 weeks in total. This instructional program emphasizes the concept of structured teaching, the students are taught according to the Malay Word Order structure. In this Word Order, students are explained that the adjective comes after the noun, wherein the adjective would describe nouns used earlier in a sentence.

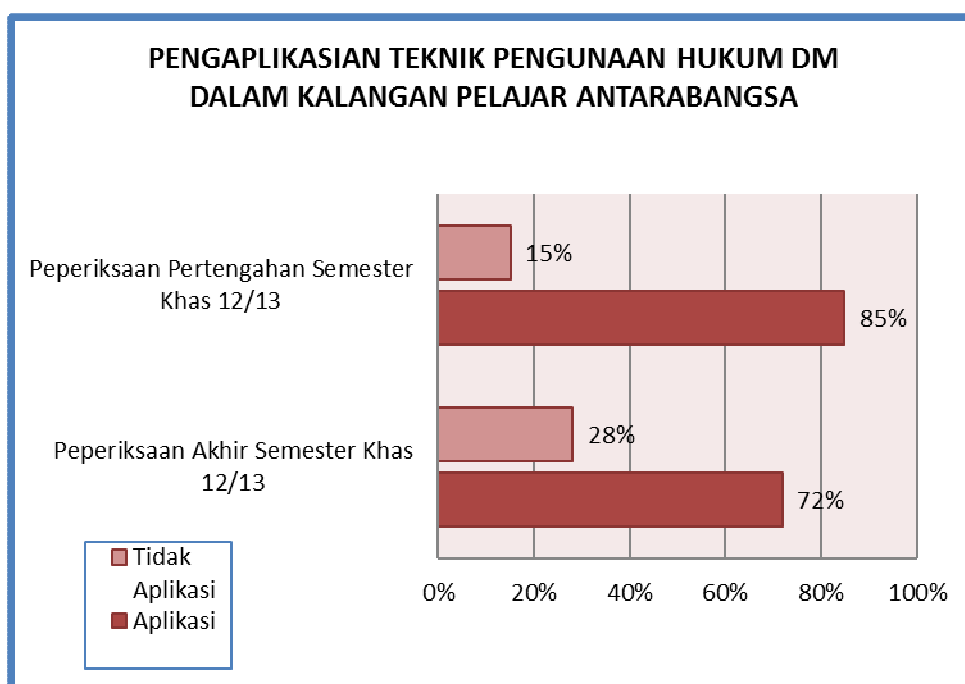
Both tests are given to students, in the middle and end of the semester involved aspects of writing. Students were asked to write a short essay related to specific topics. Mid-semester examinations were made after students go through 21 hours teaching, while the final examination was made after student finish 42 hours of teaching.

Percentage taken by counting the number of students who apply use structured methods through the use word order. Through the data of student's application of Word Order, the researcher then gets a percentage taken by calculating the number of students who get all right in the use of word order, students who only get one mistake and finally students who got more than one mistake. The data is then plotted in a bar graph for comparison of student performance at mid-semester test with the final examination.

## RESULTS

### Applying Structured Method through Word Order

According to the bar chart below, the light-colored bars represent the students who do not apply the techniques of word order, while the darker bars represent the students who apply techniques such word order. The study found that at mid-semester examination, a total of 85% of students have applied the structured method through the use of Word order in the writing of Malay language. While 15% failed to apply this method in their writing test. However, the results showed a decrease in the percentage of the final examination. A total of 72% of the students were able to apply this word order in their final exams while 28% have failed to apply this method. Comparison of this percentage can be shown as a bar chart below. The researcher thinks that this difference in percentage occurs due to the fact during mid-semester exams students were just taught noun and adjectives. So exposure and knowledge they have were still new. Compared with the final exam, the students were filled with a variety of different topics and because of this students may become confused or less skilled to apply this method.

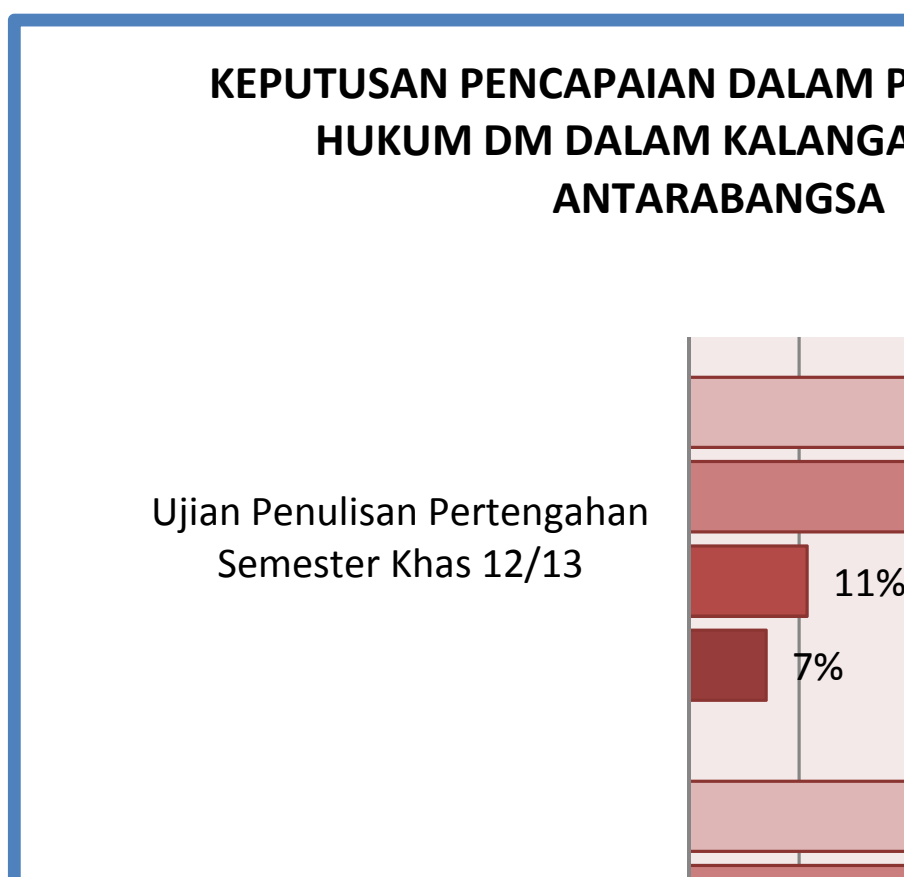


**Figure 1: Chart Shows the Percentage of Students Who Apply the Word Order Method in their Writings in Two Different Exams**

### Student Achievement in the Category of Applying Word Order

In the category of students who apply the rules of word order, the researchers divided the students who made no mistakes, students who have one mistake and students who have two or more mistakes. Here the data showed that in mid-semester examination a total of 46% of the students who got all the right or no wrong. While 36% of students have at least one error and a total of 18% of them having more than one mistake even though they have applied this method. Although many of these students have a background in Arabic language, Arabic language itself is similar to the Malay language, which is structured with "the adjective comes after the noun". However, it is found that the students are much easily influenced by the structure of the English language, which is also the mode of instruction during their study at the university, compared to the structure of their mother tongue, Arabic language.

Compared with the percentage shown in the final examination, a total of 52% of the students have demonstrated their ability to get entirely correct without any errors in the use of word order. This shows an increase in the number of students who are proficient or know how to use this method even if the percentage of students who applied this method dropped. This also proves that more and more number of students who are proficient in applying these methods when they have been in the course for a longer period of time. This percentage is shown in the bar chart below.

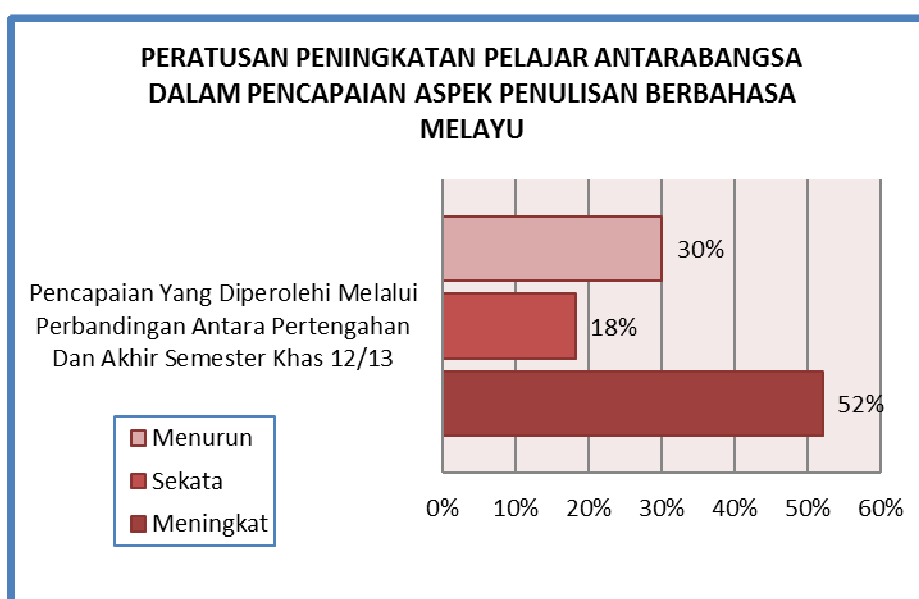


**Figure 2: Chart Shows the Percentage of Students in the Category of Applying the Rules of Word Order in Two different Examinations**

## Performance of International Students in Aspects of Malay Language

### Writing

As a whole, this study found 52% number of students increased their achievement in the writing aspect of the Malay language. This percentage is based on the number of students who got all correct in applying the word order. While the number of 18% shows an even tabulation, namely with the achievement which showed no increase or decrease in their writing examination. There were only 30% of students who decreased their achievements in the writing aspect. This demonstrated that the use of teaching techniques using this structure can give a positive impression in improving student understanding and achievement in the Malay language. This percentage is shown in the bar chart below. The first bar represents the percentage decreases while the second bar shows the percentage of the uneven bars and third turnover of the increase in the ratio of their writing skills.



**Figure 3: Chart Showing Increase of Student Achievement Percentage in the Writing Aspect of the Malay Language in the Final Examination**

### Findings

In UNITEN, teaching of Malay language to international students is according to the concept of structured grammar rules, the teaching done in stages according to the grammatical structure of the sentence construction. Thus, the restructuring of teaching syllabus is also important so that it meets the above structure and facilitates the students to understand the development of existing syntax. For example, structured teaching can be shown as follows;

Pronoun + Possessive Pronoun + “ada” + Noun + Adjective

So the teacher will teach the class and list some form of family names such as father, mother, sister, brother and so on. Then the students are taught about pronouns such as I, you, he, we, us, them and the like. In developing the ability to build sentences, the teacher introduces the words like "is", "like" and "love" to be associated with previously taught nouns. Next the international students are taught about adjectives before mid-semester examinations. This sentence structure is shown as follows;

- Ayah saya ada kereta besar (My father has a big car)
- Emak kami ada cincin mahal (Our mother has an expensive ring)
- Kakak saya suka kek manis (My sister loves sweet cakes)
- Abang awak mahu jam tangan baru (Your brother wants a new watch)

However, the study also found that some international students are easily influenced by the structure of the existing grammar in their native language. Similarly, if the international students learn English as a second language or learn English to understand the Malay language, the students inevitably will certainly be influenced by the structure of English and their native language. There are a number of structural errors made by students in UNITEN based on the data obtained, which is;

- Saya nama ... (Name my)
- Saya umur ... (Age my)
- hitam rambut (hair black)
- cantik perempuan (girl beautiful)

Nevertheless, the researchers found that with the structured grammar rules such as word order, students' learning is more focused and organized. Hence this study found that the percentage of students who understand the grammar structure is higher in the final exam (56%) than mid-semester examination (46%) although the number of students who applied this method is higher during the mid-semester test, a total of 85% compared to end of the semester, which is only a total of 72% who apply this method.

So, the findings of this study demonstrate that the structured teaching method is suitable for use in teaching Malay language to international students since this method can improve the understanding and ability of students to learn Malay and improve their performance in the examination. This method can also be applied and adopted by any institution in the teaching of Malay language to international students. However, this kind of teaching effectiveness also depends on the strengthening of activities done in the classroom as well as teachers creativity. Effectiveness also depends on the order of a planned syllabus throughout the instructional program, in any given semester.

## CONCLUSIONS

Through this structured teaching, it could draw international students to continue to learn and understand the use of the Malay language. Interest of the students also increase due the fact that it is also easy to understand what is being taught through structured methods. Government's desire to internationalize and to uphold the Malay language can be achieved if the teaching programs of the Malay language is able to attract more students or foreigners coming to Malaysia to study and learn at the same time appreciating the Malay language existing Malay culture.

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